



*fugit
inreparabile
tempus*

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Fanmix by pterawaters

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Summary:

Max goes to sleep in July 1985 and wakes up on her first day of middle school in Hawkins. It's October 30, 1984 again. She tries to keep everything the same but that's too hard, so Max makes the decision to save everyone she can before summer comes.

1. Act I

Author's Note:

Hello and welcome to my Stranger Things Big Bang! This is my love letter to time travel fics and Max Mayfield. If you recognize the dialogue, it's from the Duffer Brothers since this is also ostensibly a retelling of season 2 from a different point of view.

Tempus fugit, the expression everyone knows, is usually translated into English as "time flies". The Latin comes from line 284 of book 3 of Virgil's Georgics, where it appears as *fugit inreparabile tempus* translated as "it escapes, irretrievable time" which I felt was a better fit. I swear I'm not being pretentious. :)

A huge thank you to my beta and to pterawaters, who was mod for this Bang and also my fanartist! They created an awesome cover and [the playlist on Spotify](#).

"I'm sorry."

Max hears the words as she falls asleep that night, freckled hands scrubbed clean of ichor. Free of flaking rust, ignoring the fact that she couldn't stop crying.

She doesn't know what he was apologizing for: not being strong enough to fight a monster that wasn't human, or maybe not being strong enough to fight one which was.

Max curls up in her bed, alone and heart aching. If she strains her ears, she thinks she can hear the muffled sounds of Billy's music through their shared wall. She knows it's only her imagination, but she'll take whatever helps her sleep.

Fireworks bloom in riotous color, an echo of earlier in the night smearing across closed eyes mixing with the neighbor's celebrations.

Max falls asleep between one boom and the next, gunpowder and cheers and screams ringing in her ears.

Her mom's hand on her shoulder shakes her gently awake.

"Max, honey? You need to get up, it's the first day of school!"

"It's what?" Max is confused, and cold. "It's still summer vacation, let me sleep a bit longer."

Her mom is perky and almost cheerful, a state Max hasn't seen in months. She swallows down bile that she could act like that after last night, as if nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Except of course, that nothing out of the ordinary did happen to anyone who wasn't at Starcourt Mall.

She went to bed on a warm summer night, but a quick look at the window of her bedroom shows a hint of frost creeping in from the edges of the glass. Max rubs her eyes, hard enough to see sparks of light.

"You have school, young lady." Her mom's voice tears Max from her circling thoughts and the fast growing confusion. "Billy's out of the bathroom now, you need to at least wash your face. Be presentable for your teachers. I'm sure you're going to have a great day."

Max throws the covers off, muscle memory carrying her to the small tiled room. She doesn't scream until the sink is full and her face is beneath the surface of the water.

She blows bubbles until she can't, until her lungs are screaming for air.

A banging on the door makes Max jump for the hand towel, wiping at her face until it's only damp.

"Hurry up in there!"

Billy.

Alive.

Max opens the bathroom door and catches sight of his blond curls rounding the corner to the kitchen. She steps out of the bathroom and considers running toward him. How good it would feel to wrap her arms around him.

She doesn't get the chance.

"Why aren't you dressed yet, Maxine?" Her mother's voice snaps her out of the daydream. "You're hardly going to have time to eat breakfast if you don't hurry it along."

Max rolls her eyes but does as she's told. It isn't wise in this house to make waves, or disobey.

She sits at the kitchen table opposite brother, making a face as he shovels food in.

"Ew." she mutters under her breath, scraping jelly over her toast triangles.

"Your face," Billy mutters back with a mean grin. Max's eyes catch on the weekly issue of the *The Hawkins Post* that Neil holds up like a shield between himself and the rest of the so-called family.

October 30, 1984.

Max is so busy staring a hole into the front page and the article about Hawkins' Halloween celebration and Merrill's pumpkin patch that Billy's boot connects none too gently with her shin. She whips her head around, glaring.

He glares back, chewing with his mouth open because he knows Max hates it. He only gets away with it since they both know Neil will stay behind his paper until they're out the door. The older Hargrove is not a morning person.

Max is quiet on the car ride to the Hawkins schools. Her head pounds in time with the beat of Billy's music.

She's going to see Lucas again and he's not going to recognize her. Max tries to remember how she acted on the first day in Indiana, knowing that she needs to get the Party's attention. Or maybe they

already know it, if she's already put her score up.

She knows Lucas told her, sometime between the Snow Ball and the school ending. Max just can't remember. She slams the car door and ignores Billy's yelling as he drives over to the high school's parking lot.

Getting her class schedule and dealing with the receptionist is just as bad as it was the first time. Max keeps her bored expression on, grateful she's had so much practice.

Then it's showtime, ushered by the principal through Mr. Clarke's door and feeling all those eyes on her. She tries to take her seat in the back, forgetting for a moment, that it's not hers yet.

"It's Max." Max interrupts him just like she did before. No way is she letting anyone but her mother and Neil call her by her full name!

Mr. Clarke takes her attitude in stride, pointing her to the empty chair. Max sets her backpack down and slides onto the cold plastic.

She ignores the pressure in her head as the Party members none too subtly lean their own heads together and turn to look at her.

Max gives a small wave, nothing more than a waggle of her trembling fingers. She can't stop the grin as they all turn around to face the front of the classroom. Now she just has to get through the rest of the school day as the new kid, again.

She uses recess to skate around, knowing the Party is watching. The note is already crumpled in her jacket pocket, ready to be dropped. Her mind is already plodding through the steps of the rest of the day, how bored she's going to be all year relearning the same material.

"Next time you're late, you're walking home." Billy tells her as Max rounds the trunk to the passenger side.

"Not a problem," Max scowls and crosses her arms over her chest. She hates this Billy.

She waits to see the bikes in front of them as they drive home, but the road is empty. Which means she has to go back into town and to

the arcade, because Lucas and Dustin are going to be watching her. They're so obvious and oblivious at the same time that it's almost physically painful. She sighs and heaves herself off her bed.

"Will you take me to the arcade?" Max dares to interrupt Billy as he's getting a beer from the fridge. He's changed from his school clothes into sweats, clearly isn't planning to leave the house.

"What's in it for me?" Billy's eyebrow raises in challenge as he stares down at her.

"I'll get home by myself, I just don't want to spend time skating there and back. We both know mom and Neil aren't going to be home for hours."

Billy pops the tab, slurps up the foam that threatens to spill over. "Neil, huh? Thought my old man wanted you to call him dad."

"I'm sure he does," Max mutters. She isn't, not when she knows the truth of those odd noises that come from Billy's room late at night or why her mom sometimes calls for a girl's day out even though Max is always uncomfortable in a salon chair.

Billy purses his lips, eyes lifting to stare somewhere over her head. "Yeah sure, squirt. I'll drop you off but you need to be home by six o'clock. Not a minute later."

"Thank you!" Max beams at him, ignoring how he rolls his eyes. Maybe it will be easier than she thought to regain what they had. Then she'll be in a place to keep a better eye on him next summer and avoid everything that happened afterward.

They get into an argument in the car when Max asks for more time at the arcade. She thinks her score is up there, but it might not be. If it isn't, Max has to be at the top of the leaderboard. She's got spare change in both pockets - and her arcade jar is empty for it - but Billy isn't understanding that it's going to take hours.

He pulls up the arcade with a squeal of tires on asphalt, yelling at her before she can open the car door. "Be home at six exactly, Max, not a minute later." He repeats his words from earlier with a glare. "I don't

care if you're about to slay the biggest dragon or whatever, don't you dare lose track of time because I'm not covering for you!"

"I didn't ask you to!" Max yells back. It's amazing how mad he can make her even though she knows what's behind his angry words. Her face feels like it's on fire and her teeth hurt from how tight she's clenching her jaw. She goes to slam the door but Billy doesn't allow her the pleasure, pressing a heavy foot to the gas and leaving her behind.

She flips him off, skateboard tucked under one arm.

Max practically runs into the arcade, not able to remember if she's put her high score up yet. Turns out fighting for your life twice in eight months makes the memory funny, but Max knows the Party needs to find her score on the leaderboard.

She relaxes as her quarter bounces in and the familiar jangle of Dig Dug starts up.

"You're here again," Keith says with one hand inside his ever-present bag of Cheetos.

"And you clearly never left," Max shoots back, eyes trained on the screen.

"No one's beaten your high score yet, if that's what you're worried about."

"I'm not worried," Max says with a bit of boredom in her voice. She hopes Keith takes the hint to buzz off and go bother some other kid.

"I like you," Keith announces with a smile that's nearly as greasy as his hair. Max doesn't bother to look at him, hands moving in tandem on the controls as she evades Fygars and Pookas.

Max's character dies, and dies, and dies a third time. She spies MADMAX at the top of the board with 751,300 points after the Game Over screen flashes and blows out a breath. This had been a waste of time and explains why the Party had been staring at her all throughout school.

“Got places to be, Keith.” Max doesn’t look back as she leaves the arcade and steps outside into the crisp air.

She skates around the side streets, finds a hill long enough that blows her hair back from her face. It doesn’t blow the thoughts out of her head but it’s a start.

Halloween is tomorrow.

Max pretends not to see Dustin and Lucas at their lockers the next day, even though they’re hard to miss in the Ghostbuster costumes. She’s glad they wait to approach her until after second period because she completely forgot about the pop quiz in English.

Dustin clears his throat behind her and Max makes a face inside her locker before turning around. She keeps her eyes on Dustin because she can’t, doesn’t dare look at Lucas.

They clumsily invite her to go trick-or-treating. Max snarks back about honor, hearing what they don’t say about the party being a democracy and the majority vote. She knows Mike doesn’t like her, won’t consider her a friend until the summer’s heat is bearing down on them months from now.

Max walks away before they can explain more about their Party or lie about all the bullies at Hawkins Middle. Max knows all about bullies, she lives with one.

“We’re meeting at the Maple Street cul-de-sac at 7. That’s 7 on the dot!” Dustin calls after her as Max walks away. She can’t stay near them, not when they don’t know her but she knows so much about them.

It’s not fair to them. Max slouches in her second-row seat in World History and ignores the teacher warbling on about Mesopotamia. If she knows so much about Lucas, is it really fair to be in a relationship with him again?

“You’re late, again.” Billy tells her, like Max doesn’t wear a watch and is incapable of telling time. She scowls and tells him the truth -

she had catch-up homework because the lessons in California don't match exactly to what they're teaching here in the middle of nowhere, Indiana. It's not her fault the algebra I teacher likes to drone on.

He drives them home, Ted Nugent screaming from the speakers as the fall leaves whirl around. Billy complains, because that's what he does with Max. He yells and he shouts and he lets loose all the emotions he isn't allowed to have at home.

Max stares at the window and sticks to one, two-word answers and wonders why she didn't realize it before. He bottles up all those emotions, too busy trying to be the son Neil wants or flirting with anything that moves to show himself off as the center of attention. It means that Max gets the brunt of the negativity in safe spaces like the Camaro.

She thinks about telling Billy she knows what kind of man Neil is but he breaks her concentration by asking if she's defending Hawkins.

Of course Max is sorry that they had to leave California but it's not her fault Billy didn't try very hard to like Hawkins, to make it a home like she had. She snaps back under her breath.

Not quietly enough, apparently, like Max didn't learn the first time. She reaches for the wheel, heart in her throat as she watches Mike, Lucas, and Dustin pick themselves up from the ground.

At least this is familiar and awful all over again, deja vu at its worst. She hopes they don't know it was her in the car, hostage passenger to Billy's mood swings and anger.

It'll all blow over by the time she's jumping out of the bushes with her mask in a few hours. Billy drops her at home but doesn't seem to care that she immediately heads off down the road on her skateboard.

Sometimes, they just need some space from one another. Too alike, too angry at the world with no outlet.

Max has some time to kill in between a quick check to her Dig Dug

score even though she knows Dustin still won't be able to beat it in eight months let alone a single day and when she needs to be home for dinner before her mom lets her go trick-or-treating. She wanders around what passes for downtown Hawkins, amazed all over again that people are going about their business like normal. They're all oblivious to what's growing somewhere in town, to the fate that lies in wait.

She ducks into Radio Shack when she sees her mom's sedan drive past on her way to do the weekly shop at Bradley's Big Buy. Max doesn't have to hide, but it would be easier to avoid explanations since everyone thinks she spends most of her time at the arcade.

The electronics store is playing the oldies station and she hums along as she takes in the neon lights and grey shelves.

"Be with you in a minute!" A voice calls from the back. Max doesn't say anything in response, eyes spying the [walkie-talkie] that will be hers after Christmas.

She knows the Party - Lucas, mostly - will give it to her between Christmas and New Year's. It's going to be wrapped badly in green paper with gold deer. Dustin swears they're reindeer but Max is just as capable as he is at looking at an encyclopedia. Pointing it out had made Mike laugh so hard they'd all been kicked out of the library for the day.

Having knowledge of the future is weird and Max tries not to think about it too hard.

"That's a good one." A jovial voice tells her and she spins around.

It's Ms. Byers' boyfriend. Max takes a step back, unable to help her flinch at his smiling face. She doesn't know what happened to him, even though she goes to his funeral next week. It's going to be a closed casket. He never came back from the Lab with Chief Hopper and El.

"Oh hey," His expression melts into concern. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Max manages to say. Her voice is curt but it's better than

stammering. “Just realized I need to give up a lot more arcade days to afford it.” She chances a look at Bob and he’s back to smiling.

Good, he doesn’t suspect.

“You’re seeing Ms. Byers, right?” Max wants to hit herself in the face. She has no way to prove she even knows Will’s mom yet.

Thankfully, Bob isn’t one for thoughts like that. If anything, the question makes Bob’s face even happier. “I am! She is such a nice lady. I guess you’re friends with her kid Will? You look about the same size.”

Max rolls her eyes. “You two look happy together, is all. I’ve seen you around town, I guess. Should probably stay close, don’t want to let her get away or whatever my mom says about couples.”

Bob’s smile nearly blinds her. “Don’t have to worry about that, miss. I think I’d follow Joyce anywhere she wants to go.”

Max tries to smile even as her stomach roils. She isn’t sure she succeeds but it doesn’t seem to matter as Bob remembers he should at least be talking about something in the store rather than his girlfriend.

“So you’ve got your eye on the [walkie-talkie] huh? It’s good to have a way to communicate with your friends, much better than the tin can and string I grew up with!”

Max’s stomach starts to hurt as Bob starts talking about his own childhood.

“I have to go,” Max interrupts. She waves, not turning around, as she heads for the door.

“See you around, Will’s friend!” Bob calls out after her.

Max dry-heaves in the alley and wipes at her mouth. Then she straightens up to spend the rest of her free time in the arcade, working on a new high score on Dig Dug. She wants to be in a good mood for tomorrow’s one-on-one with Mike in the gym.

She's changed enough stuff today.

Max hopes it's enough to help poor Bob Newby and she heads home to pull her costume together.

Lucas's scream of surprise and fear still make Max laugh. She can't wipe the grin off her face, the boy who was cool as a cucumber throwing fireworks at the Mind Flayer yelling in fright just because she disguised herself as Michael Myers.

"I heard we should hit up Loch Nora," Max says, managing some excitement. It's not a lie, she's looking forward to the full-size candy bars again. The Party follows her for some reason, Mike trudging along behind to bring up the rear.

She wonders, as they walk on the street and dodge smaller kids dressed as pirates and ghosts, if she can do anything to fix their relationship before. It won't be tonight, not when Lucas and Dustin walk on either side of her with bad surfer accents.

Totally tubular, this night is not. She rolls her eyes, amused and aggrieved that the night is following the same pattern. But isn't that what she wanted? Everything to stay the same? Because what could be worse than changing something and then Max suddenly not knowing what the repercussions could be.

She misses, again, what happens with Will and how he gets to the Upside Down. She knows that's what happened and why he's shaking against the brick with eyes that don't see them, though Max doesn't learn that until after winter break when the Party explains everything in detail.

She runs down the steps to the backyard of the Loch Nora house after Dustin and Lucas. All they can do is stand there and watch as Mike shepherds Will back to the safety of being surrounded by everyone else who has no idea what lurks beneath the streets of Hawkins.

"Does he get panic attacks often?" Max asks, staring at Dustin. Neither he or Lucas respond, worry painted on their features. Just like last time.

Max skates home alone, pillowcase of candy hanging over her shoulder.

“How was the trick or treating?” Her mom asks, ironing Neil’s work shirts for the week. Wednesday is laundry day, just like Thursday is for grocery shopping. Max hates how Neil has ordered their lives by a schedule just like the military he served in, but she can’t deny it’s useful now. Mostly for knowing how to avoid her mom and step-dad.

“Snagged full size candy bars,” Max boasts as she ducks into her bedroom to throw her board on her bed. “Do you want one?”

“I’ll split a Crunch bar with you,” her mom smiles and sets the iron upright. Max grins back.

She goes to bed that night in a quiet house, no Billy to cause a ruckus or make Neil yell. He’s still at the high school party and will be home in time to drive them both to school.

Max thinks more about Lucas, and Dustin. It’s clear they’re both interested in her, but Lucas is the only one who really sees her. The only one who wants to give her a chance based on more than looks or not being ‘like other girls’. As much as Max likes Dustin - and she’s looking forward to teasing him about Susie after he gets back from Camp Nowhere next summer - right now, he sees her as an oddity. Something for his curiosity voyage.

Max falls asleep thinking about Lucas’s kind eyes and the smile he always wears when she beats a new level at the arcade. She wants that again, and vows to let nature run its course even though there must be a reason Max got sent back in time. It’s better to let things happen like they did before, so she’ll bite her tongue around Will the spy and Dustin’s new slimy pet.

How she got here is going to remain a mystery though. She doesn’t trust anyone associated with the Lab, no matter how nice and grandfatherly that Dr. Owens is supposed to be.

Now it’s Thursday morning and Max worries about school as she gets dressed. Dustin found D’Artagnan in his trash can last night, she

knows. The Party, or Mike actually, doesn't trust her yet.

"Don't change anything," Max tells herself as she laces up her sneakers. Maybe she should have checked some books about time travel out of the library, even a fictional story would have reasoning for changing things or the effects of a small change. Too late for it now, the week is half over and they haven't even gotten to the demodogs yet. Max will have little free time to read after Friday night.

"Why is this my life?" Max moans.

"If you want to ride around the parking lot before the first bell, get in the car." Billy knocks on her open bedroom door as he saunters by.

"You look like dog crap!" She calls after him and giggles at his retreating back when he just flips her the bird in response. The party last night must have been a good one, the obnoxious orange flyers even made their way to the middle school campus.

She meets Lucas out front near the bike rack.

"Did you have a good time last night?" Lucas grins at her, so happy and young. Max wonders how he forgets what happened last year with Will, she knows he downplays how bad it really was. "Was your haul as good as when you were in California?"

"It was as good," Max answers with a smile, hitching her backpack further up her shoulder. They walk into the school together, Lucas on her left and gesturing with his hands about a five-pound Hershey bar he swore he saw in a toy store in Chicago as a child that was the size of his body.

"So is Will like, okay?" Max breaks through Lucas's nostalgia. "He seemed kinda out of it last night."

Lucas looks away from her at those words, gives a little shrug. "He's fine, doing loads better." He wraps his hands around the bottom of his backpack straps.

“Really? He’s still getting called Zombie Boy.” Max points out. She knows Will isn’t confrontational at all but he just passively accepts the cruel taunts and mean jokes.

“Well,” Lucas says as they walk slowly toward their lockers. “We had a funeral for him and everything after a body was found at the quarry. We thought it was him, but it turned out to be some other kid. It was pretty bad.”

“You held a funeral after a week?” Max asks, incredulous. “That’s not funny.”

“It’s not a joke,” Lucas stops them in the hallway and other kids start to flow around them. “It’s public knowledge. Just don’t ask Will about it. He doesn’t need to relive it.”

“Of course not,” Max says quietly. “Let’s get to Mr. Clarke’s class, maybe we’ll start another unit and be done with the human brain.”

She’s not that lucky. The classroom is dark for the projector, marker squeaking as Mr. Clarke draws a line where Phineas Gage was impaled. Max keeps half her attention on the lecture she’s already heard before, frustrated her notes didn’t come back with her so she has to take them all over again.

The other half of her waning attention span is on the back of Will’s head. The bowl cut his mother gives him does no favors at making him look older than his thirteen years. She wonders if he’s already the spy, if he even knows what’s happening to him.

Will turns around and Max glances away, looking out the window in an effort to make it seem like she wasn’t looking at him. She isn’t sure she succeeds but it doesn’t matter because as soon as Will turns back around, the classroom door flies open.

Dustin apologizes, instructing Mr. Clarke to carry on with the lesson even as he talks over anything the teacher might say and makes a bigger production than if he’d just walked in quietly.

Max muffles her snicker in the sleeve of her yellow sweatshirt as the Party all lean their heads together despite sitting directly in front of

the teacher.

“AV Club, after lunch.” Dustin’s whisper is audible to at least half the class but clearly directed at Max. She gives him a grimace and a thumb’s up before he can repeat himself.

She expects Mr. Clarke to give him at least a detention for so blatantly breaking the rules but Dustin is the favorite. Max had known that by her third day at Hawkins Middle, the first time around.

The Party meets in the AV club room, a glorified closet filled with mechanics and radios and Max doesn’t even know what else. She should, she’ll be a member of the club after spring break, but Max is still learning all the names of the tiny parts and how they work.

“Isn’t he cute?” Dustin asks, eyes gleaming in the lamp light.

“And he was in your trash?” Max asks, because that doesn’t sound right. She knows Dart came from the Lab outside town and that right now, the gate is open. There’s no way a baby demogorgon would be foraging for food inside a trash can, not when Mews is feet away.

It doesn’t add up but Max keeps quiet as soon as she passes off Dart to Lucas’s waiting hands. She can still feel the slime on her skin and wipes her hands on her jeans hurriedly.

Dustin corrals Dart into the coils of his ghostbuster trap and slams the books about amphibians on the table.

“You know what a tadpole is, right?” Max definitely didn’t miss Dustin’s patronization. She rolls her eyes and assures him she does.

She tries to get the Party on the right track once Dustin says terrestrial pollywogs come from South America and India.

“Maybe some scientists brought it to Hawkins?” She’s dismissed almost instantly, everyone’s attention rightfully taken up by Dart trying to escape the lamp’s light. It doesn’t grate as badly this time, at least.

She watches Will as Dustin coos at his abnormal pet. He looks

worried but Max can't tell in the dim light if that's just his usual expression. It might be, it seems to run in the Byers family.

The bell rings and breaks them all out of the trance of watching Dart wiggle in the palm of Dustin's hand for more soft pets. Max shakes her head as everyone hurries for their backpacks and notebooks.

"Hey, you okay?" Max catches Will before he can walk out the door and be lost in the crush of students who only have five minutes before the late bell dooms them. "You looked a little out of it back there."

Will gives her a small smile, his whole face lighting up. "I'm fine, just tired. Last night was a lot."

"It was," Max admits and she's not talking about all the walking. "But it was fun, right?"

"It was fun," Will agrees and then Max gets drawn into the conversation with the boys walking ahead of them. She interjects, never going to miss an opportunity to pop Dustin's ego, and leaves Will behind before she breaks off to go to another World History snoozefest down the opposite hallway.

It's after school, when most of the kids have left to board the school bus or walked over to the high school to the cars of their older siblings, that things go wrong again.

Dustin, Max, and Lucas are in front of Mr. Clarke and about to present Dart to an actual adult who will hopefully be able to tell something is seriously wrong with it.

"Dustin!" Max chides as he repeats himself about the fact this is his discovery and not Mr. Clarke's. "Just tell him already!"

It doesn't matter because just like this morning, the door to the science classroom slams open and Mike runs in. He grabs at the Dart-trap and cradles it close to his chest, Will a few steps behind him. Will looks pale and Max wonders if he had another episode with the Upside Down.

They all chase after him, Max grateful that she knows where Mike is

headed. She's faster on wheels, is the thing and the door is slammed in her face as she reaches the AV Club door.

She hammers on it with the side of her fist. "Let me in! This isn't cool, guys!"

"You're not a Party member," Mike calls back. Max sticks her tongue out at the wood that blocks her from throttling him and sits on the floor with a huff.

The boys are loud enough she can hear them if she stays quiet.

"So it's a coincidence!" Dustin says, looking for a reason that Dart isn't from the Upside Down. Max has bad news for him but of course, no one is going to listen to the new girl.

"He's from the Upside Down!" Mike shouts and Max nods her head in agreement even though none of them can see her.

"Hopper will kill him!" Dustin's voice is raised. "He's not automatically bad! He trusts me!"

Max bangs on the door again, just to remind them that yes, she's still outside in the hallway and waiting. She gets antsy and starts to slowly pick the lock with the paperclip from her folder.

Lucas screams "Oh shit!" and Max knows it's too late. She gets the door open just as Dart makes a break for freedom. Dustin knocks her to ground and Lucas trips over her feet.

"Where'd he go?" Mike runs into the hallway, looking frantically. "You let him escape!"

"I didn't do shit," Max retorts, face flushing. Dustin steps into Mike's space as she opens her mouth to continue and somehow, they have a plan to split up and search the school for something wiggly and slimy before Max knows it.

Max knows they won't find Dart but gamely agrees to help search the school. She skates over to the gymnasium, keeping an eye on her watch. Last time, Mike found her in the boys room looking for Dart. She can't imagine he'd go investigate any noises she made in the girls

room, he seems too uptight for that never mind the fact they're all searching for a cat-eating interdimensional pollywog.

"Why won't you let me join your Party?" Max asks as she follows Mike from the boys room into the big room. Mike's honesty is expected and Max thinks it will hurt less, hearing for the second time that she's unwanted.

It doesn't hurt any less.

"I could be a Zoomer," Max suggests carefully as she skates in circles around him. Mike scoffs.

"Not a real thing."

Sometimes, Max is amazed that Mike can accept telepathic little girls and government experiments but not the concept of stepping outside his precious DnD manual.

"You're just going in circles," Mike points out. His eyes are dark as he watches her, arm crossed across his skinny chest.

"You think it's easy?" Max laughs. "You try it."

"No thanks, I don't want to fall."

"So you admit it's impressive," Max coaxes with a smile. She knows El is somewhere in the building, is going to watch them from the window and see Mike smiling at her. She just needs Mike to smile.

"You're making me dizzy, that's what. I'm not admitting anything." His lips turn up, betraying his words. Max laughs again, grinning as she starts to head in the opposite direction.

Her eyes turn toward the door as the board slips out from under her. Curly hair, pale skin, and angry confusion. This isn't her friend Jane who tried on clothes with Max and spent two whole dollars at the photobooth with her. This is Eleven, hurt and aching for her missing family and Hopper's stupid rules.

Max knows how she feels about the missing family, at least.

She hits the ground before she can call out, elbow and ribs doing nothing to soften the blow.

“You okay?” Mike rushes over.

“Fine,” Max holds a hand to her side. She’ll be lucky if it doesn’t bruise but she can cover that with her shirt. “It’s gonna sound weird, I know but it was like there was a magnet pulling my board out from under me.”

“A magnet,” Mike repeats softly. Max hates that she can watch the hope growing in his eyes. “Sorry, I have to go!” He doesn’t even look back at Max as she walks over to collect her skateboard from the far side of the gym, too busy rushing out to chase after Eleven.

She runs into Lucas on the west side of the building, the area Dustin is supposed to be searching.

“Did you find Dart?”

“No, you?”

“Only Mike.” She doesn’t tell Lucas she fell off her board, or that Eleven was there. “He doesn’t like me very much.”

Lucas grimaces. “He’ll get over it. Majority rules, the Party is a democracy.”

Mike appears from around the corner before Max can say anything else and his face falls at the sight of them. “Did you guys see anything?”

“Dart, you mean?” Lucas raises an eyebrow. “No, we haven’t found him yet.” The walkies crackle and then Max is going into another boys bathroom to find Dustin acting suspicious at the last stall.

“Where is Will?” Max tries to follow Lucas outside to look for Will but Dustin catches at the sleeve of her sweatshirt.

“Hey Max, stay indoors. It might be cold if you don’t have a jacket.”

“If I don’t have a jacket,” Max says and plucks at the yellow fabric.

“What do you think this is? Fashion?”

“I don’t pretend to understand girls,” Dustin says with a bright grin. Max narrows her eyes, watching the ballcap on his head stays a little bit too still. “I just didn’t want you to get cold, since it’s almost winter and you’re from California and uh, just looking out for the new Party member!”

“Let’s just look for Will. It can’t be any more difficult than finding a pollywog,” Max mutters. “Will! Where are you!” Her voice echoes down the whitewashed brick and metal lockers, Dustin’s mimicking her a breath later.

Max helps as she walks the length of the hallway with Dustin, taking turns calling Will’s name. They almost collide with Mrs. Byers as she runs frantically into the school before they reach the front office.

“Have either of you seen Will?”

“No,” Max frowns. Maybe she should have gone with Lucas to look outside, if they’d known sooner that Will was on the football field maybe the Mind Flayer wouldn’t have possessed him.

Lucas crashes into the building next. “The field!” He gasps, out of breath and skidding on the waxed tile as he turns around to run back. They all troop after him, Joyce outpacing even Lucas in her worry.

Max wishes she had a mom who cared so openly and buries the feeling deep inside.

“Come on, sweetie,” Joyce coos to her youngest son, brushing sweaty hair back from his forehead. “We’ll go see the doctor, maybe he can help you figure out what’s going on with these episodes.”

Max stands with Lucas, Dustin, and Mike at the top of the steps as Will climbs into the backseat of the green Ford Pinto and it sputters off the grassy hill and onto the road.

“Do we keep looking?” Max breaks the silence. “For Dart, I mean.”

“No use,” Dustin sighs and wipes at a fake tear. Lucas looks suspicious to Max’s eye but he doesn’t call out his friend. Mike is still

looking forlornly down the empty road after his best friend. "He's gone and I hope he wasn't run over by a car. He was so small!"

"Dude, he doubled in size and now has four legs." Lucas points out with a look. "He can move pretty fast when he's motivated, clearly."

"But I promised to take care of him!" Dustin practically wails and that's enough for Max.

"Okay, well," she waves at both of them as she steps back towards the school. She thinks she remembers where she dropped her bookbag. "I have to get home, it's going to take ages to skate home I bet."

"My dad can drive you home," Lucas offers, following her. Max shakes her head even as Dustin agrees.

"Yeah, that's a good idea. My mom could take you, usually but uh. We have to run errands before we go home. Mews needs some litter and stuff."

"Mews?" Max raises an eyebrow.

"His mom's cat," Mike and Lucas sigh in unison. Lucas continues, "She loves the thing. I mean really loves it."

"Mews is her baby, after me." Dustin states with no irony. Mike and Lucas share a look as Max tries not to laugh in his face.

"If your dad can take me home," Max says as she walks next to Lucas and he holds the door open for her. "That would be nice."

It should be fine. Her watch says it's almost five so Neil won't be home. The sun is setting though, and even though Max knows the way home she's still supposed to be new. She doesn't want to skate home in the dark if Lucas is offering a ride.

Mr. Sinclair is polite and mild mannered, asking her name and if she's the new student he's heard so much about from his son. Max nearly forgets herself, greets him with more friendliness than she would normally.

His lack of recognition sends her insides twisting and she gives one word answers about life in California and why they moved in the first place as the sedan drives along the forest-lined roads toward Cherry Lane.

"Thank you for the ride," Max says hurriedly as she sees the sign for her road. "You can just drop me off at the end of the block. It's fine."

"No," Lucas pushes back. "We should drop you at the door like the gentleman we are, right Dad?" He puffs out his chest, showing off for her. In other circumstances, Max would crack a joke.

"You really shouldn't," Max says very quietly and meets Mr. Sinclair's eyes in the rearview mirror. He understands what she isn't saying. "The end of the block will work just fine. I'll see you at school tomorrow, Lucas."

Mr. Sinclair drives carefully down the street, obeying the speed limit in case of children playing even though Max thinks she's the youngest person to live on Cherry Lane in a few years.

"Thank you for the ride, Mr. Sinclair." Max beams, hopes it takes the sting out of what she had to ask of him.

"You're welcome, Max." Lucas's dad says at the same time Lucas blurts out "Bye Max! See you tomorrow!"

Max gets on her board and is skating down the street before their car has turned the corner back to the slightly wealthier subdivision that the Sinclairs live in.

"Where were you, you little punk?" Billy's lifting weights in the living room with the tv blaring a show he isn't watching. "I told you yesterday that I'm not waiting around after class. Did you walk?"

"If I walked, I would be getting home even later." Max rolls her eyes and throws her bookbag at her unmade bed. "I got a ride with a classmate's dad. There was an AV Club meeting and then Will had an episode or something."

"An episode or something?" Billy follows her into the kitchen. "He sick?"

“Yeah.” Max says, voice clipped. “His mom came to find him and he was just standing in the middle of the field, eyes rolling. It was freaky.”

“Better not be contagious,” Billy pops the tab on a beer. “Watch who you hang out with, kid. Be smart.”

“You’re not the boss of me!” Max’s temper flares. “Who left you in charge? I’m not a child, I don’t need a babysitter!”

“Believe me, I’m aware you’re a hellion.” Billy shakes his head, drinks more of the beer and then holds the half-empty can against his sweaty face. “But dad and Susan left me in charge. They’re staying late at work tonight.”

“On a Thursday?” Max wrinkles her nose and Billy laughs.

“It’s Thirsty Thursday, kid. I bet my dad’s at the bar as soon as he clocks out.”

“Gross.” Max makes her feelings known. “So does this mean can we get pizza for dinner?”

Billy doesn’t say no right away, to her surprise. “Are you going to go pick it up?”

Max’s lips thin as she says slowly, “If you wanted to eat cold pizza, sure. Who knows how long it’ll take for me to skate there in the dark, and then back home holding pizza boxes. It would smell so good, maybe I’d just have to eat it, oops.” She finishes with a devilish grin.

Billy huffs at her, amusement in the corners of his eyes. “Fine. Let me shower and you can call it in. I want pepperoni and sausage, you hear me?”

“Anchovies and pineapple, coming right up!” Max cackles at his look of disgust before he shuts the bathroom door. She heads towards the phone on the hall table.

Neil and her mom come home just as the new episode of *Magnum, P.I.* finishes. The pizza box lays between Billy and Max on the coffee table, his big stinky feet propped up next to the greasy cardboard.

Her mom is laughing, cheeks flushed from the cold air or maybe drink. Max isn't sure, maybe it's both. She stops when she sees both of them on the couch but her smile doesn't disappear like it usually does when she looks at Billy.

"Look at the two of you getting along! I knew you would if you gave it a chance." Max watches as Neil puts his arm around her mom's shoulders, chuckling to himself.

"She might have had a little too much wine, my mistake." Max stares silently at him as Billy rises to his feet. "Isn't it bedtime for you?"

"It's nine o'clock," Billy answers before Max can. "We're at home, not even breaking curfew."

Max sits like a statue on the couch, very aware she is in between the Hargrove men. Her mother's face has gone pale from where she stands locked in Neil's embrace.

Neil takes a step forward, letting go of Max's mom. "Are you talking back, boy?"

"No," Billy says, fire dimmed. He picks up the pizza box on the table, folds it in half with fidgeting hands. "I was just saying, Max is fine. I fed her dinner and if you say it's bedtime, I guess that's what it is."

"Come here, Max." Her mom calls quietly as Neil stares at Billy. The tv behind him announces the debut of a new episode of *Simon and Simon*. Neil reaches for the remote on the end of the coffee table and Billy takes a step back as the house goes quiet without the television on.

Neil yells at Billy that night. Max can hear it faintly through the walls and pulls the pillow over her head to block it out. Her mother checks in on her, assures her it won't last long. Neil just has some ideas about responsibility, wouldn't it be better for everyone if Billy just understood that his actions affected the entire family? Max is speechless and turns over so she doesn't have to look at her mom but the words echo in her head as she falls asleep.

Getting up for school the next morning is an assault on Max's senses. The light is too bright and her mother too chipper.

"Can I skip the first period? We're not even doing anything, just watching a movie." Max lies and begs, even as she pushes eggs around her plate.

"Are you feeling sick?" Neil asks genially, dropping the newspaper. Max blinks and shakes her head. "Then no, you should go to school. An education is important and you should work hard in school."

Billy drops into his seat, sunglasses tucked into the collar of his shirt. His eyes are bloodshot and Max wonders how much sleep he got after Neil was finished yelling, or if he snuck out to go drinking.

She waits for Neil to say something but the older man remains silent, back behind his newspaper until they leave for school.

Mike and Lucas are waiting for her when she hops off her skateboard in front of the middle school's bike racks.

"Finally!" Mike says and marches away around the side of the building.

"What's with him? First bell doesn't ring for another ten minutes." Max says.

"He's looking for Dart," Lucas tells her and follows his friend. Max heaves a sigh and trots after them, skateboard tucked under her arm. Armed with long poles, Lucas draws the short straw after they've finished poking inside the dumpster and one of them has to actually climb in.

"Glad you make it," Mike greets Dustin caustically as he runs over. "We're looking for Dart." Lucas chucks black bags over the edge of the metal container and then jumps out himself.

"You stink," Max tells him matter of fact and walks over to stand by Dustin.

"Hey Max." She has immediate regrets when Dustin greets her with a smile and awkward shuffle of feet.

“Hey.”

Lucas tosses Dustin one of the long poles and they start poking at the trash bag. Neither Dustin or Max tell the other two how pointless it is. Will doesn't show up to first period.

“You weren't looking very hard for Dart this morning,” Max pulls Dustin to the side of the hallway between second and third period. “Do you know something and forgot to tell us?”

“What?” Dustin says, looking anywhere but Max's face. “I don't know where Dart is. He ran off, he's probably cowering under a pile of leaves or something, he's scared and alone.”

“Uh-huh,” Max says, unconvinced. Dustin isn't a very good liar. “Well it's whatever. You just might want to work on your poker face.”

“What does that mean?” Dustin calls after her. “I could kick butt in poker! If I knew how to play! Which I do!” Max rolls her eyes and heads to her next class before lunch.

The Party sits on the steps, taking in the sun and what might be one of the last warm days before the snow comes.

“There was no answer,” Mike jogs back over from the payphone and his attempt to call the Byers. “We need to talk, AV room now!”

Max crams the last bit of ham and cheese sandwich in her mouth as the boys rise.

“Party members only,” Mike tells her from the top of the steps. She stops short, brown paper bag crumpling in her hand as Dustin and Lucas both apologize but don't fight for her to join.

She pulls out a notebook and flips to somewhere in the middle. She's almost certain Will is possessed by this point. Dart is probably eating Mews, or will be by the time the sun goes down. She'll be in the junkyard the night after tomorrow, fighting off demodogs with Steve and Lucas. Then Will is the spy and the shed in the Byers' backyard becomes an interrogation room. Demodogs attack the house, Eleven shows up and brushes off Max's offer of friendship.

She resolves to do better, this time.

Then the adults and Will and El leave, leaving the rest of the Party and Steve as benchwarmers. Then Billy arrives and fights Steve, gives him a concussion and Max has to stab him with the sedative from the Lab.

She pockets the keys to the Camaro and they zoom to the tunnels. Max thinks all of that happened on Monday night or maybe in the morning. Everything had been a jumbled mess at the end, chaotic and fantastical.

Last time, Billy had been groggy but aware enough to drive them both home during the early morning hours. Max winces in the afternoon sun, remembering the consequences. Her mother had hugged her too tightly, exclaiming over the dirt and scrapes and shakiness Max couldn't quite hide.

Billy had lain low the following weekend, Max isn't sure he ever left his room. This time around, she's not going to let that happen. Maybe it could be avoided if she left a note instead of climbing out the window? She taps her pencil on the paper, thinking.

She's already talked to Mr. Newby but Max didn't go in the labs, doesn't even know what happened beyond Hopper saying he had been attacked. If she changes that small thing, what else can she change? Who else can she save, before the summer comes?

Max is no closer to an answer by the time the last bell rings. Lucas chases after her, still yammering on about finding Dart.

Max knows exactly where he is and why Dustin cut last period to go home early.

"Good luck with that," she tosses over her shoulder, setting her skateboard down to get over to the Camaro faster. Last time, she'd walked and Lucas had called out and they'd had their first argument.

He's fast, is the thing Max had forgotten.

Lucas grabs her jacket sleeve as Max puts her foot on the ground to push off, keeping her close. She shuts her eyes and sighs, thinks about

kicking the board up with her heel but then decides she likes being taller than him.

“Wait!” Lucas says. “What’s your problem?”

“My problem?” Max skates back and forth in front of him, much like she did to Mike in the gym only yesterday. “Your Party says they want me there, acts like we’re friends but it only gets me as far as the door to the AV Club, never in the room. You treat me like trash, even after I went trick-or-treating with you nerds.”

“That’s not true!” Lucas cries out. His eyebrows are furrowed, like he doesn’t understand where Max’s vitriol is coming from.

“It is true,” Max says. “I thought you guys wanted me in your Party.”

“We do! It’s just-” Lucas breaks off and huffs before starting over. “There’s things-”

“Oh, things.” Max’s interruption is the driest voice she can summon. “Of course, things you can’t share.”

“It’s just, there are things we can’t tell you. For your own safety.”

Max gives a laugh and knows it’s hollow. Lucas has no idea what Max has survived. She repeats his words, incredulous. “My own safety?”

“Yes!”

“Is it because I’m a girl?”

“No!” Lucas says firmly.

“But you didn’t keep secrets from El, did you?”

She watches Lucas’s confusion turn to suspicion. “How do you know about El?”

“Mike,” Max answers casually. She wishes she could skate around him in a circle, keep Lucas off balance but they’re standing at the edge of the parking lot’s path.

"That was different," Lucas says. He believes her little lie, that's good. "Trust me. It was just way different."

"Uh-huh," Max shakes her head and maneuvers her board to get away from him as soon as she finishes what she's saying. "I don't think I want to be in your stupid Party, Lucas. Have a great life."

It's hard to make the words harsh because she wants that for him. She really does. Max knows him so well though, knows that their early push-pull is part of Lucas's attraction. Everyone else in Hawkins is sleepwalking through their life.

"Max!" He calls after her. Max ignores him and skates down the hill to the Camaro.

Billy's been watching the entire argument, leaning on the hood of his car. He rounds the front as she hops off her board and tucks it under her arm.

"Why was that kid talking to you?" Billy asks, not even showing anything that could charitably be construed as interest. It's all aggression with him, all the time.

Max wonders how she missed the signs, in her past life.

"A classmate," Max tells him and slams the passenger door shut.

"Watch the paint job, shitbird." Billy snaps. "Why was he talking to you?"

"I'm the new kid on the block," Max rolls her eyes. "We have a class together."

"Looked like more than just something stupid about an assignment," Billy comments before lighting his cigarette. Max looks out the window but Lucas has already disappeared between the cars. She hopes she didn't screw everything up. If she has to make her way to the junkyard on Sunday night, it's going to be a lot harder to explain how she ended up there in time to narrowly avoid being the demodog's dinner.

"Why are you so upset?" Billy's voice jars Max out of her thoughts.

"I'm not!" Even to her own ears, Max is unconvincing.

Billy makes a sound like a game show buzzer, head turned toward the back window to reverse out of the parking space. "Try again, pipsqueak."

"Why do you care?"

He taps ash out the window and then rests his hands on the steering wheel, flicking his fingers like it will move the students meandering in front of the car that much faster.

"Because you're a piece of shit but we're family, whether you like it or not." He adds not quite under his breath, "meaning I'm stuck looking out for you."

Nice to know there's some things that Max is unable to change. She slumps against the passenger seat, rolling her eyes.

"Right, because everyone looks at you and thinks babysitter."

"Hey!" Billy takes his eyes off the road and grabs her gesturing arm. "This is serious shit."

"There are some people in the world you should stay away from," Max sneers in his face, summing up the words he threw in her face this time last year. "Some people, like that kid I was talking to. Because he's black, Billy. Just say what you really mean. At least your dad has the balls to be racist and not hide behind other words."

She relishes the look of shock on Billy's face and ignores the pain in her arm when his hand tightens, before he lets go. The Camaro's engine purrs as Billy blows past the turn to Cherry Lane.

"Where are we going?" Max clutches her wounded arm to her body.

"To have a talk," Billy says in a clipped tone.

He drives them out of Hawkins and a few towns over. Max can't hide her surprise.

"C'mon, Max," Billy says as he swings his legs out of the car. It seems

like he's been to this diner before.

"Two chocolate milkshakes and a plate of fries." Billy orders at the counter and then herds Max into a booth. He takes the opposite seat, resting his boots on the vinyl so she can't get up and leave.

"What are we doing here?"

Billy doesn't answer for a minute, staring out the window. There's an ashtray at the end of the table next to the napkin dispenser but he doesn't drag it closer.

"Having a chat, Maxine." Her full name draws Max up short. Billy doesn't call her that often; he prefers his stupid nicknames she's come to sort of enjoy or Max as she introduced herself after being ordered by their parents to shake hands like miniature adults.

"About what? My friends are none of your business."

"Your friends?" Billy raises an eyebrow. "Thought he was just a guy in your class."

"Maybe a friend," Max mutters to the table. Billy's boot nudges her thigh.

"Milkshakes and a fry plate," the waitress calls and Billy heaves himself up to get them.

"Did you get a chocolate milkshake to prove a point?" Max asks archly even as she sucks it down and starts mixing in the whipped cream topping. "Because it's not a good look."

"No!" Billy says, smacking the bottom of the Heinz bottle over the plate. "I got them because you like chocolate best."

"Oh."

Billy looks at her, blue eyes not as hard as they were when they were both in the car. "Family, shitbird."

"Like it or not." Max finishes.

Billy blows out a breath. "Yeah, so we have to get some things straight."

"Like how you're a racist and I'm not gonna live with one." Max interrupts before he can speak further and derail her.

"Will you let it go? I was looking out for you!"

"I'd buy that if you didn't grab my arm and tell me that there are certain people in this world I should stay away from!"

Billy glares at her though its effect is lessened by the red and white striped straw in his mouth.

"Y'know," he muses with a smirk after polishing off a good portion of the shake.. "I don't remember saying that at all. Seems to me you've been thinking those things, maybe want to take a good hard look at yourself? Glass houses and all."

"You don't sound any smarter when you echo your dad, Billy." Max says wearily and crams six fries in her mouth at once. She almost chokes for her hubris.

"My old man's a racist, you said so yourself." Max nods with her mouth full and Billy continues. "I'm looking out for you, kid. You have no idea what he'd do if he saw you and that kid today. You need to be more careful, it's a small town and word gets around."

"We're thirteen, I'm not jumping into the backseat with Lucas." Max rolls her eyes. "And none of this bullshit about looking out for me, jackass."

"I am looking out for you."

"Not when you're disparaging my friends over their skin color." She glares across the table. "Get over it, Billy. Stop being just like your dad."

"I am nothing like him." Billy whispers furiously, eyebrows drawn down to make a menacing scowl.

"You sound like him, telling me it's for my own good because you

don't want to face the truth that you're a racist. Then there's this," Max lifts her arm above the table height and pushes up her sleeve. Just like last time, there's distinct finger shaped bruises on her freckled skin.

"Yep," Max says, tugging her sleeve down before the waitress can see and bustle over with questions. "Just like him."

Billy looks sick. He lights a cigarette with shaking fingers.

Max sips at her milkshake and waits him out. Billy stubs it out when he's taken only a few inhales. He rubs a hand over his face.

"That's what I was gonna talk about," he sighs. "There's some rules and you're a little eager to go jumping into the middle of the fight when you think you're right."

"Don't be stupid and I won't have to fight," Max rolls her eye and snatches the last fry before Billy can eat it.

"Yeah yeah, I'll work on it." Max glares and kicks his shin under the table. "I will! It's just easier to echo him, less trouble for me."

"But it's wrong."

"A lot of my old man is wrong."

Max lowers her voice and leans in. "Like how he hits you?"

Billy jerks back. "He doesn't hit me."

Max scoffs. "Right, Neil's just disciplining you. Like if you cut your hair or took out your earring he'd suddenly be coming to basketball games or whatever."

"No, probably not." Billy tilts his head. "But you, you stay out of his way. Keep your trap shut about whatever you see." He jabs his finger in her face to punctuate his words.

"That's not right!"

Billy obnoxiously slurps up the last of his milkshake and pushes the

empty glass to the table's edge. "Life isn't fair, Max. It's full of shitty people, who make shitty choices and pass them on to their kids."

"Not everyone is like that!"

"Just calling it like I see it." Billy shrugs before he leans across the table with a mean look on his face. "I wasn't kidding though. You ever come between me and my old man, we will both make you regret it. Comprene?" His hands are clutching the table with white knuckles but he doesn't touch her.

Max nods, sniffs back the tears and snot that want to make an appearance. Billy leans back and slumps in his seat, reaching for the cigarette in the ashtray.

"Glad we understand one another. Go wash your face and we'll get outta here. We should be home in time for dinner."

Max does as she's told, splashing cold water on her heated skin after she's blown her nose with scratchy paper towels tugged one by one from the dispenser.

It feels like she won something, getting Billy to maybe stop being so racist and to stop grabbing her to make his point. It also feels a lot like she lost something that she didn't know she was missing.

She cries a little more in the bathroom, a few tears falling before Max wipes them away. She stops staring at her reflection in the fluorescent light and goes back out to the diner where Billy stands by the door to take them home.

Things aren't fixed between them, just because Max called him out. They won't be, not unless Billy decides to change himself. Max can hope though. That's all she has left.



*fugit
inreparabile
tempus*

Story by lucdarling
Fanmix by pterawaters

Mind Flayer – *Turbo Knight*
History Repeating – *Propellerheads ft.
Shirley Bassey*
Land of Confusion – *Genesis*
Maniac – *Carpenter Brut, Yann Linger*
Every Breath You Take – *The Police*
Every Rose Has Its Thorn – *Poison*
Cold as Ice – *Foreigner*
Hard Time – *Seinabo Sey*
Don't Stop – *Fleetwood Mac*
It's My Life – *Bon Jovi*
Hero – *Mariah Carey*

Track List



2. Act II

Max wakes to sunshine on Saturday morning and stays in bed as the familiar sounds and smells of her mother's weekend breakfast waft through the small house.

She gets ready for the day, drops a handful of quarters in her pocket and bounces into the kitchen.

"Good morning, mom!" She beams at her mom and does her best to snatch a cooling piece of bacon from the bed of paper towels.

"You're in a good mood," her mom smiles back. It's small and hesitant. Max hugs her for it.

"No school today," Max excuses and takes her purloined bacon to her seat at the table. Neil chuckles as Billy shuffles in, hair wrecked. He looks like he's hardly slept.

Max eyes the space between father and son cautiously. She hadn't heard anything last night beyond the regular thump of Billy's music but that obviously can't be counted on.

Billy catches her eye and shakes his head just a little. Max deflates and eats her rubbery eggs without complaint. Her mom is her mom and is obviously the best, but she still shouldn't be trusted in the kitchen.

"Can I go to the arcade this afternoon?"

"If your brother takes you," Neil answers before anyone else can open their mouth.

"Sure," Billy says without a snarl. Toast crunches between his teeth. "I got nothing better to do than drive Max around town."

"Be home in time to do your chores, please." Susan speaks to all of them at the table.

"Okay, Mom." Max agrees and gets up from the table, empty plate in hand. Billy clears the rest of the table as Neil gets ready and leaves

with a kiss on her mom's cheek.

She bounces her leg, skateboard held in one hand as a buffer between her and Billy. He's added sunglasses to the barely tamed hair, jacket and one of his date night shirts.

"Be out in an hour," he starts to warn.

Max waves at him, rolling her eyes. "Or I'm skating home, I know. I just need to defend my score."

"I don't care, shitbird. One hour." Billy reminds her and the Camaro roars out of the parking lot.

Max enters the arcade, blinking to adjust her eyes to the dim lighting. She makes a beeline for the Dig Dug machine, blinking at the Out of Order sign.

"There's another one in the back," Keith says in between bites of orange cheese puffs that drop dust down his shirt. "Can't get a tech out here until Tuesday at the earliest."

"That one doesn't have my high score." Max huffs.

Keith smirks at her. "Untouched and pristine, just waiting for your grubby hands all over the controls. Follow me." He turns around, not even waiting to see if she'll do as he says.

Max holds his Cheetos as Keith unlocks the employee door. She stares at Lucas as it swings open. He gives her a nervous smile.

She walks into the room, ignoring Keith as he tells them he better not hear any thumping and to keep it PG.

"I just needed a safe place," Lucas explains after Keith leaves them alone.

"To what? Be creepy?" Max says with incredulity.

"I'm going to explain what happened last year," Lucas says. His hands gesture as he speaks and Max fights the urge to take one of his hands in her own. "But if anyone finds out you could be arrested. Or killed."

“Killed? I don’t think anything is that important.”

“Do you accept the risk?” Lucas asks slowly, repeating himself after Max stares at him.

“Yeah, sure.” She sets her board on the grimy floor and takes a seat on the only chair in the room to listen to Lucas tell her about Will’s disappearance and poor Barbara Holland.

“Cool story,” Max says. “Points for originality.”

Lucas sends her a confused look. Max remembers how skeptical she was last year and plays it the same. She picks up her board and leaves the room with a quip that storytime is over.

“Why don’t you believe me?” Lucas cries as she storms between the arcade machines. A quick look at her watch shows that her hour is almost up.

Max spins around, facing him. “I wanted to be a part of your stupid Party, Lucas. I didn’t ask for you to make up some fantastic tale about Will’s zombie nickname. I don’t appreciate being the butt of a joke but tell your friends I fell for it, get those experience points.”

“It’s not a joke.” Lucas says. He grabs at her arm and Max shakes him off, taking a step back.

He doesn’t try again. “We have a rule in our Party,” Lucas says. “Friends don’t lie.”

“And I should believe you?” Max raises an eyebrow. She walks over to the Dig Dug machine and tears off the Out of Order sign, sticking it to Lucas’s jacket. “How do you explain this?”

“I had to!” Lucas exclaims. “To protect you!”

“Protect me from what? These demogorgons from another dimension that you claim exist, that you haven’t seen in a year? A little girl who grew up abused and alone with powers? Also conveniently someone you haven’t seen since she disappeared. If she was even real. Maybe,” Max sneers. “Maybe the big bad Hawkins Lab! Yeah I’m sure they’re just lying in wait for someone to spill their secrets.”

Lucas puts a hand over her mouth. "Stop," he says firmly. "You're going to get us killed." His eyes are wide and scared.

Max hates that look on him, knows she'll see it tomorrow night.

"Prove it," she challenges.

"I can't."

"Exactly my point." Max says as she hears the Camaro engine rev over the sounds of the bells and whistles of the various games around them. "It's a good story, I swear I'll believe it your Party asks but we're done here."

"Just trust me." Lucas pleads.

"I have to go." Max says as the engine revs again, winding her way in between the kids as she makes her way to the doors. "Don't follow me out, okay?"

She doesn't look back as Lucas shouts after, "So do you believe me?"

Max gets in the car and Billy rolls his head away from looking at the arcade to staring at the parking lot. He pulls out with another screech of tires.

She looks back and sees Lucas standing in the sunlight, watching her leave.

They get down the street, around the corner and then Billy slams on the brakes with no warning. Max jerks back in the passenger seat.

"You're an idiot but you're usually not so brainless," Billy says in the same tone of voice that demands an explanation. He doesn't look at her, relaxed in the driver's seat with a hand dangling almost out the window. "We literally had this conversation yesterday. You know what happens when you lie."

"I'm not lying." Max cries out. Billy turns his head to stare at her, not taking the sunglasses off. Max hates when he does that, unable to tell his moods accurately.

"I didn't know he'd be there." Max continues. "It's a small town, we were just hanging out."

Billy visibly grits his teeth and ignores the car behind them laying on its horn. He waves them on and presses a button on the dash to turn the Camaro's hazard lights on.

"I can take care of myself." Max hisses as Billy stays silent. "He wasn't bothering me. Lucas is just a silly boy with a crush and he thought it would impress me to pretend Dig Dug was broken so he could tell me some lame story in the manager's office."

Max tells the story of her afternoon in broad strokes, because Billy has muscle and maybe that would be a good thing to have in the tunnels in two nights. Or if, god forbid, the summer's events occur again he can be warned. Billy fixates on the last part of the sentence instead.

"Did he touch you?"

"No!"

"Are you lying to me?" Billy gets in her face, looks over the top of his sunglasses. His blue eyes are dark and stare into her.

"No," Max says, a little more calmly. She doesn't say she can still feel Lucas's hand in hers before she left the arcade, how her skin tingles.

Billy slams his hand on the dashboard and turns off the flashing lights with a press of a button. Max peers at him and he's chuckling.

"Oh, of course your little sweetheart is a gentleman." Billy's sarcasm pours off him in waves. "So long as that's all, and you don't continue to be dumb by meeting with strange boys who aren't good for you in places you don't belong!" He slams the steering wheel once, twice.

"It was the arcade," Max says slowly. "I spend all my afternoons there. I'm not going to stop just because you don't like it."

"Just don't be stupid, Maxine." Billy says, pulling onto the road. "I can't cover for you if I don't know what you're up to."

Max crosses her arms. "I never asked for you to cover for me."

"Just get started on your chores when we get home," Billy sighs and turns onto Cherry Lane.

They don't speak at all once home, Billy getting frustrated with the lawn mower on the side of the house as Max scrubs down the kitchen counters and floor.

"Oh, this practically sparkles!" Her mom gushes as she comes in through the back door, toeing off her shoes on the mat. Neil tromps in behind her, work shoes squeaking on the linoleum.

"Looks like you missed a spot," Neil grins as he looks behind him. Max tightens her hands around the mop handle as he continues to walk across the just cleaned floor to the master bedroom.

"He's just teasing you," her mom assures her. "It won't take very long at all to clean up those spots."

"I shouldn't have to," Max sighs.

"I'm going to get started on dinner," her mom muses, dismissing Max's words that weren't quite under her breath. "Is meatloaf okay?"

"Just a regular Midwestern family, huh?" Billy comes in from the back door, shedding grass clippings and dirt as he trudges to his room. "What's next, a jello salad with fruit in it for dessert?"

"I'm going to hurt you," Max screams at his sweaty back. "I just finished cleaning the floor."

"Oops," Billy calls back and slams the bathroom door behind him.

Her mom looks sympathetically at her as Max steams. "Just a little more left to do, Maxine. Then you can go read a comic or something, I can handle dinner on my own."

"No," Max says as she starts cleaning up after the Hargrove men. More time spent with her mom is an easy thing to give in these early days, before the summer ruins everything.

Even with Max setting a timer per her mom's instructions, the food is overcooked and dry but Max chokes it down. Conversation is at a minimum, her mom chattering happily about the mall that's supposed to be open by next summer and how that will be a great place for Max to go with her friends.

Max keeps her eyes on her plate, interacting only where necessary. Billy shovels the food in his mouth like he's got somewhere to be and asks to be excused as soon as his plate is clean. To her surprise, Neil grants it and Billy leaves for the evening.

It's a quiet night in the household, until he returns stumbling drunk and Billy mistakes Max's bedroom door for his own.

"What are you doing?" Max hisses. "Get out, you stink." Teenage boy and beer and probably some mary jane, knowing Billy and how the people here party. No white powder anymore, not like at the boardwalks.

"Why're you asleep?"

"Because it's like, one o'clock in the morning dipshit." Max keeps her voice low. "Your room is next door."

"I'm going," Billy mumbles and then stumbles to the ground. Max sits up in bed, reaching over to turn the nightstand's lamp. "Should clean your room next, since you did such a good job with the kitchen."

"You broke my board, you jackass!"

Billy doesn't respond as he picks himself up slowly and Max bunches her fists in the fabric of her comforter. Her board, already old and almost too small, lies cracked on the floor from Billy's full weight landing on it.

"Get out of my room, Billy." Max manages to say even though she wants to scream. She should have remembered that her board would be broken tonight but that's why she brought it into the house. It prevented Billy from driving over it as he went out after dinner, Max was supposed to have been in the clear.

It's beyond frustrating that she was wrong.

It also raises questions about just how much she will be able to change tomorrow night. What if she can't change things and this has been pointless? What if she wakes up again and again, constantly fixing things with no effect? A sinking feeling grows in Max's stomach, leaving her to toss and turn until the sun rises.

The doorbell rings as Max is duct taping her board back together the next afternoon. Their parents are out of the house until the evening, spending the day in Indianapolis.

Max is just pleased she didn't have to spend a half hour sorting through the junk drawer in the kitchen just to find the duct tape in the garage. She sets her repaired board next to her as Billy screams at her to answer the door.

"Fine, I'll get it." She storms past him, holding her breath as she walks through the cloud of smoke surrounding him. It seems dumb, smoking a cigarette at the same time as lifting weights but Max is sure he thinks it makes him look cool. Older teenagers are silly like that.

Lucas waits outside the front door, eyes cutting to Billy as he looks past her. Max whips her head around but Billy is still occupied with the tv and his routine. No wonder Neil and Susan find a reason to leave the house on Sunday afternoons.

"What are you doing here?" Max shuts the door behind her.

"I have proof."

Max narrows her eyes. "Proof of what?"

"What I was telling you yesterday. But we have to go now."

"I can't just leave in the middle of the day," Max says suspiciously. "How do I know this isn't just another joke?"

"It's not a joke," Lucas says. "I promise. Look, Dustin called a code red which means it's life or death. I'm not kidding. But that was this morning and I missed it because I was at church and then my little sister turned off my walkie and I missed the second code red so now we really have to go!"

“We?” Max echoes. “So am I in your party now?”

“Yes. Now are you going to come with me?”

“Come with me if you want to live?” Max jokes, complete with accent.

“What?” Lucas’s confusion is clear.

“The Terminator? It came out last week, I saw it before we left California.”

“Oh.” Lucas sighs. “The Hawk gets any movies like, at least a month after they come out in big cities. I think I’ve seen a trailer.”

“Right,” Max shakes her head. “So you have proof about these alternate universe monsters and you’re definitely not taking me into the woods away from town to dismember my body.”

“No!” Lucas’s horrified face makes her laugh. “But I do want you to come with me. You remember Dart, right?”

“Kinda hard to forget the slimy alien thing when it’s dumped into your hands.”

Lucas snaps his fingers. “Alien, that’s exactly right. So it turns out Dart molted and is a baby demogorgon. He ran away from Dustin last night.”

“Are you serious?” Max crosses her arms over her chest. “Fine, I’ll follow you into the stupid woods but if this is another prank I will get even, Sinclair.”

“Cool,” Lucas says with relief. “I swear, not a prank. We’re trying to catch Dart now. Get your skateboard!”

“It broke,” Max frowns. Sure, she’s taped it but she doesn’t want to try it out when the events of tonight still wait to unfold. Plus there’s no use bringing a skateboard to the junkyard or the woods.

“That’s fine, you can stand on the pegs behind me.” Lucas’s offer is immediate.

“My window is the second on the right. Now get off our porch,” Max orders. “Unless you want Billy to catch you here. I’m not sure what he’d do to you.”

Lucas swallows, eyeing the yellow door behind her. “Right. See you soon then.” He practically runs down the front yard to his bike. Max watches him pedal away, legs pumping.

She goes back inside, only to be confronted by Billy. He places his arm out to rest on the mantle, blocking her from walking past.

“Who was at the door?” He asks, music still blaring at top volume which is how she knows he didn’t eavesdrop.

“Uh, Mormons.” Max wants the ground to swallow her up as she tries the same lie as before. The same one that Billy definitely didn’t believe then, or now.

“Mormons?” Billy echoes with a chuckle. He exhales and blows smoke into her face.

Max does her best not to flinch.

“They were talkative. Made the mistake of asking a question and then they wouldn’t shut up.” She knocks his arm off the mantle as she walks past to her bedroom.

He knows she’s lying, and Max knows he’s aware it wasn’t Mormons at the door. All Billy does though, is open the front door and walk onto the porch. Max can picture him fuming, how he rolls his lips in anger and swallows down how he wants to scream at her.

She shuts her bedroom door, no use in being discovered just before she makes her escape. Maybe Max should leave a note, reassure her mom that she hasn’t been kidnapped or whatever it is she thought that sent Billy tearing through Hawkins that night. Max never got a clear answer from anyone, just a three week grounding and a month of indoor chores.

She rips a piece of notebook paper from the binder she uses for English class and grips a pencil. The words come easily.

Be back in the morning, busy saving the town. Protecting the world.

Max scoots her desk chair almost under her doorknob. It won't stop anyone from entering, but hopefully it'll give them pause. She raises her window and Lucas is there, waiting.

"Come on," Lucas beckons. "Hop on the back."

Max climbs through her window and onto the small roof of the wood pile for the fireplace they don't use. Neil had forbidden all of them from lighting it until he found someone to inspect the chimney. Max knows it will be sometime in December until that happens, after the first snow and they all spend a weekend wrapped in blankets because the heating goes out.

Lucas takes them across the backyard of her house and through the brush. He pedals furiously and Max stays silent, hands gripping his shoulders. Soon enough, they're on Elm, a few blocks away from where it intersects with Cherry. Lucas pedals furiously until he reaches the hill on Habersham and they coast down to Randolph Way.

It's straight to the junkyard after that, ignoring the turn to Sattler's Quarry. They arrive as Steve and Dustin are upending their raw meat buckets onto the ground.

"I said medium-well!" Lucas calls from the top of the hill. Steve looks between Max and Dustin she crosses her arms.

"What's going on?" Max asks.

"I don't know," Dustin bites out. "What's going on, Lucas?"

"Okaaaay," Steve says slowly, looking between them. "I think that old bus is the best place to stage an attack."

"We're not attacking anything!" Dustin exclaims.

"Right, right." Steve shakes his head. "But it will be the best place to wait, better than one of these cars which don't have any windows." He kicks at the tire of one, making a face.

“We could fortify it,” Lucas adds, looking around the junkyard. “There’s bound to be metal sheets and I don’t know, car doors or something we can use.”

“A plan!” Steve claps his gloved hands, making a disgusted face when they stick together. “Let’s get going before we lose daylight.”

Max hauls scrap metal to the bus, roaming around the broken down cars in between so Dustin and Lucas can have their whispered conversation on the far side of the red car. She finds a piece of pipe, rusted on end. This will be useful, later on. Max wants to bring more of a fight this time, now that she knows what’s coming.

She grunts as she picks up another piece of metal, leaning it against the others at the bus. She doesn’t fully remember how Dustin had arranged them before, for maximum protection.

Steve bangs the folding chair against the car, making her jump even from feet away.

“We lose light in 40 minutes, let’s go!” Steve orders them. Max rolls her eyes as both boys jog over. A quick look at her watch tells her Steve isn’t wrong, it’s already five o’clock.

She spies the ladder as Steve pours the gasoline and props it up against the bus’s emergency exit before letting the other three do the lifting of the tires to the roof to provide a counterweight for the hanging sheet metal.

They all board the bus, just before the sun disappears below the tree tops. Even with most of the seats missing, it’s cramped. Steve leans the nail bat against the wall and sits down.

“Should we have a watch schedule?” Max asks. They didn’t, before. It just fell to Lucas because he had the binoculars.

Steve shrugs, the de facto leader even as Dustin warm to the idea.

“Yes! That’s a great idea!”

“You don’t need to sound so condescending,” Max sits on one of the remaining intact seats next to the ladder, leaning against the solid

plastic. Everything is quiet outside.

“I wasn’t being condescending.” Dustin’s confusion is real. Max shakes her head, impatient at herself. She’s jittery now, full of nerves about the upcoming fight. “It’s a good idea, I was just surprised.”

Lucas sighs before Max can argue. “I brought the binoculars, I’ll take the first watch.”

It’s quiet, once Lucas climbs up the ladder.

“So you fought these things before, right?” Max ignores Dustin’s muttering.

Steve nods, flicking his lighter open and closed. Max doesn’t call attention to it, has seen Billy do the same plenty of times when he wants to leave the house but isn’t allowed to go further than the porch. It must be something about older boys or maybe just smokers in general.

“You’re sure it wasn’t a bear?” Max checks, sliding her eyes to look at Dustin. His face contorts and he spins around to jab a finger at her face.

“If you don’t believe us, why are you even here?”

Max stares at him, arm crossed across her chest. She slumps further into the bus seat.

“Just go home!” Dustin hisses. Max pushes herself up from her seat.

“You want me to walk home, alone in the dark, with those things just waiting out there?” Max balls her hands into fist at her sides and Steve gets between them quickly.

“Hey hey now, let’s chill out. Both of you, separate corners.”

“You can’t put us in time out, jackass.” Dustin says, turning to argue with Steve. Max climbs the ladder, feet moving quickly before either of them can call her back down.

“Way to go, man. Show her you don’t care.” She can hear Steve say

to his protege and Max stifles a groan. They're both idiots.

Max purses her lips as she clambers on top of the bus next to Lucas. She's done a lot of thinking about their relationship last night, about the fairness of entering into it again when she knows so much more about Lucas than he does about her. He was the first in the Party to trust her - to see Max for herself, not as someone who wanted to take El's place in the Party or as an oddity because she was a girl who liked to skateboard and kicked ass at Dig Dug.

Lucas had been the only one who tried to tell her the truth about Hawkins, making sure Max was prepared for the danger. She thinks she might love him for that, both in the future and right now. Now they just have to survive the night and the tunnels.

She believes in them, better together than apart. She resolves to be kinder this winter and spring.

Max swallows the words back as she gets a look at the fog rolling in, covering the junkyard's brown grass and filling in the shadows of hulking wrecked cars and the trees on the far end.

"It looks like the ocean," Max says quietly. She's homesick for a single burning second, emotion she doesn't want to name washing over her like a cresting wave.

"You miss it?" Lucas moves off his belly to look at her through the gloom. "The ocean, California? Hawkins probably seems pretty lame in comparison."

Max shrugs, looking at the metal of the bus roof she sits on as her grief recedes at the sound of his voice and the smile he turns on her.

"No, it's not that bad." Max answers. She remembers talking about her dad the first time she lived through this, but it's been almost two years now since she talked to him on the phone. Her dad has never called the house on Cherry Lane even though her mom swore she gave him the new number.

Not even a call at Christmas.

Max looks out over the fog and blinks away tears that threaten to fall.

“My mom and stepdad, they thought this would be a fresh start. Which is total bull.”

Lucas hums, indicating he’s listening. It doesn’t stop Max from continuing to explain about Billy’s anger, her fears that she’ll end up just like him. It’s a greater fear this time around, as she navigates tonight and knows she can’t stop everything even if she tried.

“I know I’m angry too,” Max apologizes. “I’m sorry.”

She waits for Lucas to say something, anything. He only looks at her, those dark eyes searching over her face like he can see into her soul.

“Jesus, what’s wrong with me?” Max scoffs at herself as her tears make a reappearance and there’s no hope of blinking them back. She wipes at her face, hates that it’s red-hot with embarrassment.

“Hey,” Lucas finally speaks. He shifts upright, leaning over the ladder and the open roof access to be closer to Max without leaving his watch position. “You’re nothing like your brother.”

“You’re super smart and cool. You’re different.” Lucas grins at her, raising his hands. “You’re tubular!” He laughs then, clearly pleased when Max can’t help but join in.

“Thank you for trusting me, Lucas.” Max says, scooting around with her feet dangling into the bus to bump her shoulder into his. She bites at her cheek as Lucas’s grin appears. “I know you didn’t have to tell me about any of what happened last year, or all of this.” She gestures to the junkyard they’re nominally watching.

“It’s cool, Mad Max.” Lucas is smiling so hard she thinks his cheeks must hurt.

“I want to-” Max started. No, she doesn’t actually want to tell Lucas about her accidental time travel. She trusts him, but everything that’s going to happen tonight is so big. So important, Max needs Lucas at his best and not distracted by her own science-fiction tales. They can figure out how she got here again after they survive it all and Max stops being grounded.

It doesn’t matter what she would have said, when they hear a

demodog howl.

“Shit.” Lucas curses, flopping onto his belly behind the protection of the tires. Max is quick to follow suit, peering over into the fog.

“You think we should stand up?” Lucas whispers as Steve and Dustin shuffle down below to their own line of sight.

“I guess?” Max answers vaguely before getting to her feet. She keeps her eyes trained on the darkness at the far end of the junkyard as Dustin screams for information.

There’s an unsettling growl that raises the hair on Max’s arms and the back of her neck.

“Ten o’clock!” Lucas’s voice cracks and she doesn’t make fun of him for it. Her blood is hot, heartbeat pounding in her ears and her throat as Dart chitters, growls from his shadowed position.

“You sure that’s not a dog?” Max jokes weakly.

“Here,” Luca thrusts the binoculars at her. “See for yourself, Mad Max.”

She uses them to look around the rest of the junkyard, trying to spot the other demodogs she knows are there. The bus door screeches open as Max lowers the binoculars.

She hands them back to Lucas and sticks her head into the bus.

“What is Steve doing?”

Dustin’s head whips toward her, eyes wide. He clutches the lighter in one hand. “Dart isn’t going for the meat trap.”

“So he suddenly wants chicken?”

“Steve put himself on the menu instead.” Dustin’s clearly nervous, rushing back toward the window’s vantage point as Steve whistles.

She climbs down the ladder, confident Lucas is safe on the roof for now. Max and Dustin watch, animosity forgotten, as Steve makes a

lot of noise in the middle of the junkyard.

Max only wonders now if the fog is natural. The tunnels had been cold and gloomy like this too.

“He’s going to get himself killed,” Max mutters to herself. She can’t see the other demodogs, and trusts that once again Lucas will sound the alarm when he spots them.

“He’s awesome,” Dustin breathes as Steve quips at the demodog he can see in front of him.

“Steve! Watch out! Three o’clock!” Lucas’s voice is full of fear and Max holds her breath as Dustin rushes to open the bus door.

“Abort! Abort! Steve, get back here!”

Steve manages to duck the demodog and rolls across a car hood as they watch in horror. Dustin starts yelling first and Max joins in, shouting encouragement.

The next moments are frantic, Dustin diving for the radio and announcing their impending death as Steve uses his legs to keep the metal in place at the door. Claws appear in the wall, making Lucas and Max jump back. She rushes to the side, finding the metal pipe she stored earlier in the day.

It’s not even that long, the length of her arm, but it’s a weapon.

She grasps it as everything falls quiet.

There’s a thud on the roof, followed by another as the demodog walks toward the access hatch. The one Lucas left open when he climbed down to yell at Steve from the bus door.

Max stands below the ladder. If she grabbed hold of it, she could push it up and into the demodog. Maybe that would be enough to startle it, if sudden movements didn’t attract its attention. She still has nightmares about how fast they can move when motivated.

She watches with mounting horror as the demodog’s claw wraps around the ladder like a human hand. It growls, petal head peering

around the hatch before snapping down towards Max.

She screams and raises the metal pipe she brought into the bus, jabbing at so many teeth. Max has learned she can rescue herself these past few months and doesn't feel guilty about changing the timeline a little bit.

Then Steve is there, just like before. He shouts as Lucas draws her next to him.

Yep, this is just as terrifying as the first time it happened. Lucas is shaking next to her, or maybe Max is. It's hard to tell with their hands linked as Steve continues shouting, bat raised.

"Are you insane?" Lucas whispers to her. Max shrugs, hand clenched around her makeshift weapon.

Then it's really over, silence falling again as the bus shakes and the demodogs move off into the woods with growls and yips that fade into the distance.

"What was that?" Max asks at the same time Steve steps into the junkyard, bat raised.

"Steve scared them off," Dustin answers confidently.

"No way," Steve turns to look at the three of them crammed in the doorway of the bus. "They're going somewhere."

"We should follow!"

"Are you crazy?" Lucas asks Dustin on the heels of his whisper-shout. "We were almost killed!"

"We need to find Dart." Dustin sets off on the path of the demodogs before any one of them can begin to argue. Steve sighs and swings the bat once, twice before propping it on his shoulder and following.

The fog has dissipated with the demodog's departure. Between the moon and the beam of the flashlight, Max can see their prints in the damp grass leading towards the overgrown railroad.

Not that they know that's where they're headed.

They get stalled on the track as Dustin and Lucas fight about Dart, the Party's stupid rules and Max knowing everything that happened last year, even if she didn't believe it. Or pretended not to believe it, this time.

"If she didn't believe it, why's she carrying that pipe around?" Lucas points to Max's grip on the cool metal. "Sure looks like someone who's ready to help us fight. Max scared off the demodog on the roof!"

Max is drawn into the argument, feigning horror about Mews' death and taking Lucas's side even though she knows Dustin had no idea his new pet came from the Upside Down. Dustin seems suspicious about the pipe Max refuses to relinquish but is distracted by another mention of Dart's exponential growth.

Steve shouting gets their attention and they stop arguing over each other to hear the screeches and growls at the Lab.

Steve takes off first, Dustin and Lucas right behind him into the woods. Max is left alone on the tracks, grateful for her improvised weapon even though she feels relatively safe in the knowledge the demodogs won't leap on her. She huffs and follows the boys, a few steps behind.

Lucas puts the binoculars to his face and turns his head, trying to find any sign of the demodogs.

"They went home," he pronounces gravely. "They went back to the Lab."

No one argues this time, rushing through the forest until they reach the fencing topped by barbed wire.

"Guess they didn't want people to get in."

"It is the government." Dustin offers sagely.

"We could dig a hole?" Max offers doubtfully.

“No time,” Dustin decides. “We’ll keep walking until we reach the main gate, where the cars go through.”

They keep running until they hear voices. Nancy and Jonathan, Max realizes as they clear the woods and see them.

Max lets out a quiet sigh of relief as they all look at one another. They’re almost home free, it’s just a matter of the Lab turning the power back on.

Dustin jams repeatedly at the button to open the gate.

“There’s no power,” Max tells him. “It’s useless.” Dustin ignores her as Steve and Nancy round the front of Jonathan’s car to look up at the dark building.

“Look! Lights!” Nancy calls out. Slowly, they flicker on floor by floor. The gates slowly roll back.

“Stay here,” Jonathan says as Nancy gets into the passenger seat. “There’s not enough room for all of you in the backseat.”

“And we don’t know what we’re facing.” Nancy calls, normally cheerful face settling into something hard.

“Demogorgons,” Max says grimly. Lucas has taken her hand again and she squeezes it without thinking.

“And what, you’re expecting them to run through the gate so you can whack them?” Dustin asks, staring at the pipe in her other hand as they watch the car drive up to the building.

“Better than just chucking a radio at them.” Max responds heatedly.

“Hey, hey.” Steve spins around. “It’s not a half bad idea. Do I think they’re gonna get out of the building? I sure as hell hope not. But we don’t know what is going on so better to be armed.”

“Son of a bitch,” Dustin spits out. “Fine, I’ll go find a weapon.”

He doesn’t get a chance to even look for a sturdy branch or anything as Jonathan’s car flying past them without slowing down. Hopper’s

Blazer roars to a stop next to them before Max can blink.

“Get in!” He shouts, leaning over to open the passenger door. Lucas climbs in first, Max following with her pipe and Dustin clambering in awkwardly over the seat. Steve slams the door shut once he’s in the passenger seat and Hopper’s vehicle jumps forward when he stomps on the gas.

“What’s going on?” Lucas’s voice breaks the hush.

Hopper’s voice is rough. “A pack of those things came out of the basement there, some sort of portal created and kept open by the scientists. They were studying it. We’re going to regroup at Joyce’s house, something’s going on with Will.”

“What?”

“What do you mean?”

Dustin and Lucas talk over one another but Hopper doesn’t answer as they come upon the Byers’ house. He throws the truck into park and walks quickly toward the front door, left wide open.

“Uh, I guess we follow.” Max’s voice gets them all moving and then they’re in the Byers’ living room. It’s a mess, crayon tunnels taped on the walls and ceiling and furniture.

“What is this?”

“I don’t know.” Lucas tells her, eye wide as he looks at the sight. Jonathan appears in the hallway, looking exhausted.

“You can set your weapons down,” Jonathan looks discomfited as all the eyes turn to him.

“Sure thing, man.” Steve says and leans the nail bat against the couch. Max’s hand unclenches from its death grip on the pipe slowly. She sets it down and takes a step away from it, feeling empty and uneasy.

Max looks around the room. Mike has disappeared into Will’s room. She sits on the couch, sinking into the worn cushions with a smile as

Lucas grabs them both some soda.

She knows what's coming, this time. It wasn't enough to save Bob Newby but she still has the rest of tonight to live through. Max can do it, again. This time she won't be so frightened, or hesitant.

It's a guessing game if she'll do enough to change the course of the summer. All Max can do is hope, and maybe take a trip to a certain warehouse in the spring just to make sure her friends and family are safe.

Notes for the Chapter:

This has been a labor of love and I hope you readers enjoyed it. Please leave a comment for your author and artist, and check out the other Big Bangs in the collection!

Works inspired by this one:

- [Fanmix for "Fugit Inreparabile Tempus"](#) by [pterawaters](#)